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Operational activities for development

Implications of aligning the strategic planning cycles of the United Nations funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 98 of resolution 62/208, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it on the implications of aligning the strategic planning cycles of the United Nations funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review and to provide recommendations on changing the review from a three-year to a four-year cycle, in order for the Assembly to make a well-informed decision during its sixty-third session. The Assembly, in the same resolution, underscored the importance of ensuring that the strategic plans of funds and programmes were consistent with and guided by the comprehensive policy review, which established the main intergovernmentally agreed parameters of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

The report provides options with regard to changing the comprehensive policy review from a triennial to a quadrennial cycle and analyses the implications of such a change on the planning process and cycle of each of the funds and programmes covered, namely: the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme. Recommendations are provided for consideration by the General Assembly, on the basis of the analysis contained in the report.

* A/63/150.

** The delay in the submission of the present report was due to extensive consultations with the United Nations funds and programmes.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate and context

1. In paragraph 98 of its resolution 62/208, on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly on the implications of aligning the strategic planning cycles of the United Nations funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review and to provide recommendations on changing the comprehensive policy review from a three-year to a four-year cycle, in order for the Assembly to make a well-informed decision during its sixty-third session. Prefacing this request, the Assembly, in paragraph 97, underscored the importance of ensuring that the strategic plans of funds and programmes were consistent with and guided by the comprehensive policy review, which established the main intergovernmentally agreed parameters of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

2. The request can be seen as part of an overall effort to improve coherence in the functioning of the United Nations development system, based on the guidance given by Member States. The General Assembly has consistently underscored the importance of the triennial comprehensive policy review, through which it establishes key system-wide policy orientations for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the United Nations system.

3. Given the importance of the comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the operational work of the United Nations system, the strategic plans of the funds and programmes should be guided by the policy orientations contained in the review. Currently, however, the cycles of planning of the funds and programmes are not synchronized with the cycle of the review. Better alignment of the strategic planning processes of the funds and programmes with the cycle of the comprehensive policy review, thereby ensuring that the strategic plans were finalized upon the conclusion of the comprehensive policy review, would improve the conditions for the strategic plans to reflect the guidance of the review.

B. Objectives and scope of the report

4. The objective of the present report is to analyse the implications of aligning the strategic planning cycles of the United Nations funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review, and to provide recommendations on changing the review from a three-year to a four-year cycle. The report examines two options for changing the review to a four-year cycle and for ensuring the alignment, which should help inform the deliberations of the General Assembly in this regard.

5. The analysis covers the planning activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), which are coordinated by the Economic and Social Council and whose Executive Boards report to the Council. Together, the planning activities of the four organizations account for more than 60 per cent of the expenditures on operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

6. While the analysis is confined to the above-mentioned four funds and programmes, the comprehensive policy review addresses the entire United Nations system. The question of aligning the strategic plans with the comprehensive policy review applies equally to all organizations of the system. Currently, the pattern and cycles for the planning processes differ greatly from one organization to another (see para. 15 and table 2).

II. Advantages of holding the comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development on a quadrennial basis

7. There are several advantages to changing the comprehensive policy review from a three-year to a four-year cycle.

8. First, a sufficient amount of time is needed for the United Nations system to put in place the measures to implement the guidance given by the General Assembly in the comprehensive policy review. Currently, a period of only one and a half years elapses between any given triennial comprehensive policy review and the Economic and Social Council launch of preparations for the next review. Developing a system-wide plan to implement the review takes five months. The procedures and governance mechanisms of the various organizations, the process of arriving at a system-wide consensus on specific follow-up measures and the inherent difficulties of introducing and managing change tend to slow down the momentum of implementation. Holding the comprehensive policy review on a quadrennial basis would allow the United Nations system to have a more realistic time frame in which to implement the guidance provided by the General Assembly. It would also allow more time for the measures to have an impact on the functioning of the United Nations system and on the situation in programme countries.

9. Second, adopting a four-year cycle would open the possibility of synchronizing the strategic plans of the funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review so that the plans, and thus the support provided by the organizations to programme countries, could reflect the guidance from the review.

10. Third, in terms of preparations for the comprehensive policy review, a four-year cycle might allow for a midterm review of the implementation of the guidance by the General Assembly from the previous comprehensive review, which could provide a more solid basis for guiding the preparations for the next comprehensive policy review. A four-year cycle would also enable the United Nations system to have more time to prepare reports to support the review by the Assembly. The reports could provide a more comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of the results of the implementation of actions, in terms of development effectiveness and efficiency, including in programme countries. The analysis could also benefit from evaluations carried out by individual organizations on the themes of the comprehensive policy review.

11. Finally, reducing the frequency of comprehensive policy reviews could generate savings for the United Nations Secretariat, regarding both regular and extrabudgetary resources, some of which could be used to strengthen other areas of the work on operational activities, such as evaluations and analytical work to be carried out in preparation for the review, or to strengthen the implementation of

paragraph 28 of General Assembly resolution 62/208, on improving statistical reporting on the financing of operational activities.

12. Overall, a four-year cycle would save time and resources. It would allow an additional year during which to focus on the process of implementation of the guidance provided by the General Assembly in operational activities for development rather than on the process of planning.

III. Current situation regarding the alignment of the strategic plans of the funds and programmes with the triennial comprehensive policy review

A. Oversight and implementation roles of the Executive Boards

13. The strategic plans of the funds and programmes constitute the main instruments by which the organizations implement their mandates and the policy guidance of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. The Executive Boards of the funds and programmes, whose functions have been defined by the Assembly in various resolutions (see General Assembly resolutions 48/162 and 50/227), exercise oversight over those instruments. The Executive Boards are in effect mandated to ensure that the activities and operational strategies of each fund or programme are consistent with the overall policy guidance set forth by the Assembly and the Council. The budgeting processes of the four funds and programmes are aligned with their strategic plans.

14. UNDP and UNFPA have the same Executive Board, while UNICEF and WFP each have their own, with WFP also reporting to the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

B. Strategic planning processes of the funds and programmes

15. Currently, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP have four-year strategic planning cycles,[1] as follows:

Fund/programme	*Current cycle*	*Previous cycle*
United Nations Development Programme	2008-2011	2004-2007
United Nations Population Fund	2008-2011	2004-2007
United Nations Children's Fund	2006-2009	2002-2005
World Food Programme	2008-2011	2006-2009

16. UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF have fixed-planning cycles, while WFP has a rolling system whereby it reviews and adjusts its plan every two years. With the

[1] UNDP and UNFPA shifted from a five-year to a four-year period, starting with the 2000-2003 cycle. UNICEF shifted from a rolling plan, updated every two years, to a fixed four-year plan, starting with its 2002-2005 cycle.

exception of UNICEF, the periods covered by the current strategic plans of the other three organizations coincide in 2008-2011.

17. The WFP plan, which is rolled every two years, coincides with that of UNDP/UNFPA only every other cycle and with that of UNICEF in alternating periods.

18. Since UNDP and UNFPA have the same Executive Board, their planning processes closely coincide, especially in terms of the submission of their reports, plans and budgets to the Board.

19. The United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the United Nations Volunteer Programme are separate funds created by the General Assembly and associated with UNDP. All three report to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. Of the three, only UNIFEM prepares and submits a medium-term strategic plan in the same format as UNDP and following the same cycle as UNDP. The United Nations Office for Project Services also reports to the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA.

20. At its annual Executive Board session in June, UNICEF held discussions on extending the current planning cycle by two years, to 2011. The question will be considered again at the Board session in September. If a decision is made in that regard, the next UNICEF planning cycle would cover the period 2012-2015, coinciding with the other funds and programmes.

21. The planning processes of the four organizations have evolved over time, not only as a result of their efforts to harmonize and streamline their work but also in response to policies emanating from the comprehensive policy review and evolving methods and standards for planning and management, notably with the shift to results-based management.[2] The planning processes are being refined as new features and approaches are introduced.

22. With the 2015 target date for realizing the Millennium Development Goals approaching, it will be critical for the funds and programmes to enhance efforts towards reaching the Goals, which should be reflected in their strategic plans. Alignment with the comprehensive policy review would also bolster consistency among the plans around the themes and approaches of the review.

23. The programming cycles of the funds and programmes differ from those of other entities of the United Nations system, as shown in table 1:

[2] UNDP and UNFPA shifted from a five-year to a four-year period, starting with the 2000-2003 cycle. UNICEF shifted from a rolling plan, updated every two years, to a fixed four-year plan, starting with its 2002-2005 cycle.

Table 1
Programming cycles of entities of the United Nations system

Entity	*Instrument*	*Previous cycle (Number of years)*	*Current cycle (Number of years)*	*Next cycle (Number of years)*
FAO	Medium-term plan[a]	2004-2009 (6)	2006-2011[b] (6)	To be decided
ILO	Strategic policy framework	2002-2005 (4)	2006-2009 (4)	2010-2015[c] (6)
UNAIDS	Strategic framework	2006-2007[d] (2)	2007-2011 (5)	2012-2015 (4)
UNESCO	Medium-term strategy	2002-2007 (6)	2008-2013 (6)	2014-2019 (6)
UNIDO	Medium-term programme framework[e]	2006-2009 (4)	2008-2011 (4)	2010-2013 (4)
WHO	Medium-term strategic plan	2006-2007[f] (2)	2008-2013 (6)	2014-2019 (6)

Abbreviations: FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; ILO, International Labour Organization; UNAIDS, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNIDO, United Nations Industrial Development Organization; WHO, World Health Organization.

[a] The plan is renewed every two years.

[b] The current FAO programming cycle should be 2008-2013. By its decision, CL/131 REP (para. 34), however, the Governing Body decided to postpone the issuance of the medium-term plan (2008-2013). As a result, the 2006-2011 plan still applies.

[c] In 2007, the Governing Body decided that the new strategic policy framework should cover six years instead of four. See report of the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee (GB. 300/12/1 (Rev.), para. 102).

[d] The biennial unified budget and workplan used to be the main planning framework of UNAIDS. In June 2006, the Programme Coordination Board requested the secretariat to develop a strategic framework. As a result, the 2007-2010 strategic framework was adopted. At its 22nd session in April 2008, the Programme Coordination Board decided to continue the quadrennial strategic framework, which serves as the basis of the biennial budget. In addition, it was decided that the current framework would be extended to 2011. Consequently, the next programming cycle will cover the period 2012-2015.

[e] The framework is updated every two years.

[f] Before 2008, the biennial programme budget was the main programming instrument.

C. Strategic planning processes vis-à-vis the comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development

24. General Assembly resolutions on the triennial comprehensive policy review form an important basis upon which the operation and performance of the funds and programmes are assessed by intergovernmental mechanisms, in particular by the Executive Boards and the Economic and Social Council.

25. The triennial comprehensive policy review process is conducted according to the schedule of meetings of the General Assembly (regular session, from September to December) and the Economic and Social Council (substantive session in July), as follows:

- The triennial comprehensive policy review is usually conducted by the General Assembly, from October to December of the year of review.
- In the year following the review, the Economic and Social Council approves the management plan submitted by the United Nations system for implementation of the review and undertakes other tasks mandated by the Assembly or the Council. The Assembly may adopt a procedural resolution on operational activities and undertake any mandated tasks.
- In the second year following the review, the Council reviews the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review and adopts a resolution providing substantive guidance for the preparations of the next triennial comprehensive policy review. The Assembly may adopt a procedural resolution on operational activities and undertake any mandated tasks.
- During the year of the triennial comprehensive policy review, the Council considers a report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive review. It does not adopt a resolution, but its debates guide the Secretary-General in preparing draft recommendations to support the General Assembly in conducting the triennial comprehensive policy review in the third quarter of the year.

26. The secretariats of the funds and programmes submit annual reports to the Council on the progress of each fund and programme towards implementing the related General Assembly resolutions, the reforms of the Secretary-General and the follow-up to the international conferences. A consolidated list of issues, which is central to the improved coordination of operational activities, is also submitted by the secretariats to the Council. It serves to identify issues on which the funds and programmes seek guidance from the Council, in particular with regard to the triennial comprehensive policy review. The report of the joint meetings of the four Executive Boards also addresses issues related to the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review.

27. The Council's review is also informed by reports prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with the United Nations system, on progress and results in the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review and on other topics, as mandated by the General Assembly and the Council.

28. Table 2 shows how the strategic planning processes correspond with the current triennial cycle of the comprehensive policy review, using the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review as a point of reference.

29. The interface between the current planning processes of the four funds and programmes and the triennial comprehensive policy review does not allow the plans to benefit from the guidance of the latest review in a timely manner. The plans are either prepared much ahead of the triennial comprehensive policy review, or are already being implemented when the latest review is being conducted. The timing gaps are rather significant.

30. For instance, the UNFPA plan was ready six months before the conclusion of the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review. In the case of UNICEF, the triennial comprehensive policy review in 2004 was conducted during the third year of its previous planning cycle and the 2007 review in the second year of its current planning cycle. For WFP, the plan approved in 2003, was prepared more than 12 months ahead of the 2004 triennial comprehensive policy review; in the next cycle, the new plan approved in 2005, was prepared six months after the 2004 triennial comprehensive policy review; and in the successive cycle, the new plan approved in 2008, was prepared six months after the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review.

31. Overall, the strategic plans have recently tended to include more references to guidance from the triennial comprehensive policy review than they have in the past. The plans usually make broad references to the relevance of the triennial comprehensive policy review in setting their overall context and guiding principles. Some also include a few references to more specific provisions of the review. Even in the absence of direct references to the review, the core principles and policy orientations contained therein are embedded in the directions of the plans, including on the role of the Millennium Development Goals as a key framework; national ownership; capacity-building; partnerships and inter-agency collaboration and coordination; simplification and harmonization; the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework as instruments of country coherence, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment; and South-South cooperation.

32. The strategic plans also reflect the demands of programme countries and the Executive Boards, as expressed during the midterm reviews, country and programme evaluations and the consultations held with Member States in preparation for the plans.

33. In some instances, when the strategic plans have been reviewed for approval, or at the annual review of implementation, when the Executive Board has felt that the triennial comprehensive policy review policy orientations were not sufficiently reflected, the Board itself has provided specific directions to integrate more fully the policy orientations into the plans.

34. This was the case for UNDP. In September 2007, its Executive Board endorsed the strategic plan with the proviso that it would be a "living document", which would be reviewed by the Executive Board on a regular basis and would reflect the implications of the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review. A detailed document on the implications of the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review for the strategic plan including in the chapters on coordination, democratic governance, capacity development and crisis prevention and recovery (see DP/2007/43/Add.2) was submitted at the 2008 annual session of the Executive Board. It should be noted that the Executive Board's decisions, in framing the plan, drew heavily upon the orientations and agreed language of General Assembly resolution 59/250.

35. Although a number of provisions of the triennial comprehensive policy review are not directly reflected in the strategic plans, many actions taken in direct response to the review are reflected in the reports of the funds and programmes submitted to the Economic and Social Council, including those involving system-wide collaboration. Information on actions taken on a system-wide basis is also provided in the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review.

Table 2

Strategic planning processes vis-à-vis the triennial comprehensive policy review

A. Triennial comprehensive policy review and United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund planning process[a]

Intergovernmental process	*Pre-TCPR year (2006)*				*TCPR year (2007)*				*Post-TCPR year (2008)*			
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Economic and Social Council, General Assembly			Economic and Social Council: resolution providing guidance for TCPR	General Assembly: possible procedural resolution on operational activities			Economic and Social Council: debate on TCPR preparations (no resolution)	General Assembly: resolution on TCPR adopted in December			Economic and Social Council: providing guidance on TCPR implement-ation	
UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board	*Previous plan cycle (years 3 and 4)*								*New plan cycle (year 1)*			
First regular session (Jan.)	Plan preparations (UNDP) Report to the Economic and Social Council on TCPR				Strategic plan outline; Report to the Economic and Social Council on TCPR				Report to Economic and Social Council on TCPR			
Annual session (June)		Plan vision (UNDP); annual report				Draft new strategic plan; three-year cumulative reports				Strategic plan (update); annual report		
Second regular session (Sept.)							Revised strategic plan; biennial support budget[b]					

Abbreviations: TCPR, triennial comprehensive policy review; UNDP, United Nations Development Programme; UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund.

[a] UNDP/UNFPA planning process, based on the 2008-2011 plan cycle. The UNDP strategic plan update, discussed at the 2008 annual session, was requested by the Executive Board.

[b] Normally approved at the second regular session.

B. Triennial comprehensive policy review and United Nations Children's Fund planning process[a]

Intergovernmental process	*Pre-TCPR year (2006)*				*TCPR year (2007)*				*Post-TCPR year (2008)*			
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Economic and Social Council, General Assembly			Economic and Social Council: resolution providing guidance for TCPR	General Assembly: possible procedural resolution on operational activities			Economic and Social Council: debate on TCPR preparations (no resolution)	General Assembly: resolution adopted in December on TCPR			Economic and Social Council: resolution providing guidance on TCPR implement-ation	
UNICEF Executive Board	*Current plan cycle (years 1-3)*											
First regular session (Jan.)	Report to Economic and Social Council on TCPR				Report to Economic and Social Council on TCPR				Report to Economic and Social Council on TCPR			
Annual session (June)		Annual and three-year cumulative report				Annual report				Annual report		
Second regular session (Sept.)			Updated financial estimates, four-year cycle				Updated financial estimates, four-year cycle				Midterm review of strategic plan	

Abbreviations: TCPR, triennial comprehensive policy review; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund.

[a] UNICEF planning process, based on the 2006-2009 plan cycle.

C. Triennial comprehensive policy review and the World Food Programme planning process[a]

Intergovernmental process	*Pre-TCPR year*				*TCPR year*				*Post-TCPR year*			
	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
Economic and Social Council, General Assembly			Economic and Social Council: resolution providing guidance for TCPR	General Assembly: possible procedural resolution on operational activities			Economic and Social Council: debate on TCPR preparations (no resolution)	General Assembly: resolution on TCPR adopted in December			Economic and Social Council: providing guidance on TCPR implement-ation	
WFP Executive Board	*Previous plan cycle (years 1 and 2)*						*New plan cycle (year 1)*					
First regular session (Feb.)	Report to Economic and Social Council and FAO Council Report: update on management plan				Report to Economic and Social Council and FAO Council Report: update on management plan				Report to Economic and Social Council and FAO Council Report: update on management plan			
Annual session (June)		Reports: Annual performance; update on management plan				Reports: Annual performance; update on management plan	Revised/ approved new strategic plan at annual Board session			Reports: Annual performance; update on management plan		
Second regular session (Oct./Nov.)				Report: update on management plan				New biennial management plan			Report: update on management plan	

Abbreviations: TCPR, triennial comprehensive policy review; WFP, World Food Programme; FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

[a] Based on TCPR 2007; WFP process based on regular planning time frames.

IV. Options and implications for aligning the strategic planning cycles of the funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review

36. Section IV of the present report examines the implications of changing the comprehensive policy review from a three-year to a four-year cycle, in respect of the following two options:

(a) Option 1: proceed with the triennial comprehensive policy review as scheduled in 2010 and shift to a quadrennial comprehensive policy review beginning in 2011, with the first quadrennial policy review to be held in 2014;

(b) Option 2: hold the first quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2011, thus extending the period for the implementation of the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review by one year.

37. Each option has different implications in terms of aligning the strategic plans of the funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review. Table 3 sets out the implications of both.

A. Overall approach in determining the two options

38. In drawing up the options, certain assumptions were made, as follows:

(a) The objective of the alignment is to ensure that the planning processes draw upon guidance from the comprehensive policy review. The alignment would lead to greater coherence in the policy orientations among the strategic plans;

(b) The schedule of the sessions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly are fixed, in respect of the review process: for the Council, the operational activities segment of the substantive session is held in July; and for the Assembly, the comprehensive policy review starts in October and concludes in December of the comprehensive policy review year;

(c) The current four-year strategic plan cycle is maintained. The planning process of the funds and programmes involves between 9 and 17 months.[3] The planning process should be completed before the end of a current plan cycle, with submission to and approval by the Executive Board of a final (revised) successor plan, at the latest, by the second regular session in September/October of the final year of the ongoing plan. This would give a maximum of seven months to adjust the draft strategic plan after the comprehensive policy review;

(d) The Executive Board's agenda should be set to ensure timely approval of a new plan and availability of the support budget;

(e) The Executive Board would adjust its planning and budgetary cycle to enable the alignment of the planning cycle with the comprehensive policy review;

[3] The planning process would involve approximately 7 to 15 months, from initiation of preparations to submission of a draft plan; and two months, to revise the draft and submit the revised plan. Plan documents need to be submitted at least six weeks in advance of the Board sessions.

(f) Initial consideration of a successor plan may draw upon guidance from the existing resolution on the comprehensive policy review, given the continued relevance of existing policy directions.

39. The following important considerations should be borne in mind when reviewing the options, including:

(a) The amount of time and effort spent on planning activities vis-à-vis implementation;

(b) The need to provide adequate time between the adoption of the most recent resolution on the comprehensive policy review and the finalization of the strategic plan, ensuring the key role of the resolution in guiding preparations for the plans. One year should suffice for drafting and refining a strategic plan in which the comprehensive policy review is adequately considered;

(c) Changes to the present planning and programming systems should have no adverse effect on the continuity of programming support.

B. Two options for aligning the strategic plans of the funds and programmes with the comprehensive policy review

40. Paragraphs 41 to 54 below examine the following for each fund and programme: (a) the scenario in terms of alignment of the current cycles with the comprehensive policy review; and (b) the changes required to better align the strategic plans with the comprehensive policy review.

Option 1
Triennial comprehensive policy review in 2010; quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2014

41. The next triennial comprehensive policy review is scheduled to be held in 2010. Option 1 assumes that the review would proceed as planned and that the first quadrennial comprehensive review would be held in 2014.

United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

42. The scenario would be as follows:

- The current UNDP/UNFPA cycle would end in December 2011.
- After the triennial comprehensive policy review concludes in December 2010, there would be a window of about two to three months to prepare draft plans reflecting the outcome of the review before submission of the final strategic plans to the Executive Board in June 2011.
- The successor plans should be adopted no later than at the Executive Board's regular session in September 2011. UNFPA would aim for the adoption of its plan at the annual session in June 2011.
- At the first quadrennial policy review in 2014, the same pattern of interface would take place.

Adjustments needed to ensure alignment

43. There would be no adjustment in the transition to a quadrennial policy review in this scenario.

United Nations Children's Fund

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

44. The scenario would be as follows:

- The current UNICEF cycle would end in 2009. Preparing for the successor plan (2010-2013) would begin in September 2008, with the mid-term review. The most recent General Assembly resolution on the triennial comprehensive policy review (resolution 62/208 of 2007) should guide the new planning cycle.
- The interval between the adoption of the 2007 resolution on the review and the adoption of the successor (2010-2013) plan would be about 21 months.
- The new plan would be operational and would be in its second year of implementation by the time the next (2010) triennial comprehensive policy review was to conclude.

Adjustment needed to ensure alignment

45. In order to provide adequate time for the 2010 comprehensive policy review decisions to be reflected in its strategic plan, UNICEF might need to adopt 2012-2015 as the new period for its successor plan. The current cycle would have to be extended by two more years, up to 2011. As mentioned above, UNICEF is considering making such a change. The new plan period would coincide with the UNDP/UNFPA successor plans. In the meantime, UNICEF would have to ensure that the 2007 triennial comprehensive policy review was fully reflected in its plan through its mid-term review process.

World Food Programme

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

46. The scenario would be as follows:

- Preparations for a new rolled plan (2010-2013) would start around June 2008 and end in either June or October 2009, when the revised plan would be submitted to and adopted by the Board.
- The new plan would be operational by the time the 2010 triennial comprehensive policy review was to conclude and the second year of implementation (under a new rolled plan) would start when the first quadrennial policy review was to conclude. The interval between the adoption of the 2007 resolution on the review and the adoption of the successor 2010-2013 plan would be between 16 and 22 months.

Adjustment needed to ensure alignment

47. For the 2012-2015 rolled plan, there is adequate time to reflect the 2010 triennial comprehensive policy review. WFP would ideally not roll its plan in 2010

and would consider a fixed four-year planning period, starting in 2012, which would be better synchronized with the comprehensive policy review cycle and also coincide more regularly with the UNDP/UNFPA plan cycles.

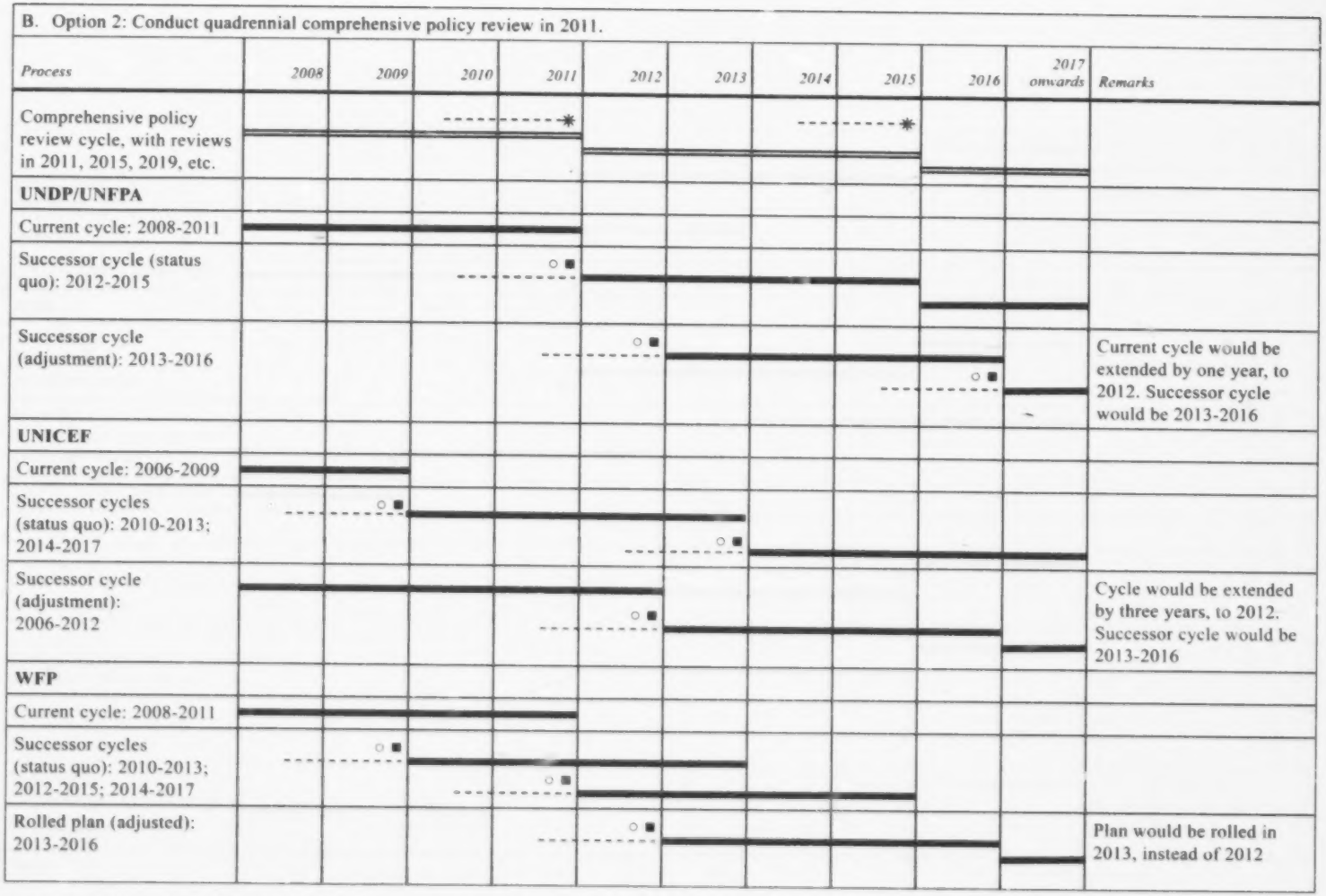
Table 3

Options for aligning the strategic planning processes with the comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development

A. Option 1: proceed with the triennial comprehensive policy review as scheduled in 2010 and shift to a quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycle beginning in 2011, with the first quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2014.

Process	*2008*	*2009*	*2010*	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017 onwards*	*Remarks*
Comprehensive policy review cycle, with reviews in 2010, 2014, 2018, etc.			✱				✱				Comprehensive policy review cycle starting in 2015 would end in 2018, etc.
UNDP/UNFPA											
Current cycle: 2008-2011											
Successor cycle (status quo): 2012-2015				○ ■							
Successor cycle (adjustment): 2012-2015				○ ■				○ ■			No adjustment
UNICEF											
Current cycle: 2006-2009											
Successor cycles (status quo): 2010-2013; 2014-2017		○ ■				○ ■					
Successor cycle (adjustment): 2012-2015				○ ■							Cycle would be extended two years, up to 2011
WFP											
Current cycle: 2008-2011											
Successor cycle (status quo): 2010-2013		○ ■									
Rolled plan: 2012-2015				○ ■							No adjustment; synchronized with comprehensive policy review

B. Option 2: Conduct quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2011.



Note: assumptions: draft plans are submitted to the Board at its annual session; final (revised) plans are approved at the second regular session, as necessary.

Abbreviations: UNDP, United Nations Development Programme; UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund; WFP, World Food Programme.

Legend: ---------: planning/preparatory processes, *: General Assembly resolution on comprehensive policy review; ———: comprehensive policy review cycle; ———: planning cycle; ○: draft plan submitted to the Board for review, ■: final/revised plan submitted to/approved by the Board.

Option 2
Quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2011

48. The General Assembly may decide to shift the comprehensive policy review to a quadrennial cycle, by holding the next review in 2011. The possible scenarios and adjustments needed are set out below.

United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

49. The scenario would be as follows:

- The current UNDP/UNFPA cycle would end in December 2011.
- Preparations for and the conduct of the next comprehensive policy review in 2011 would coincide with the period of preparing the successor plan.
- The plan would be ready for approval by the Board at either the annual session in June or the second regular session in September, before the conclusion of the comprehensive policy review in December 2011. The planning process would not benefit from the outcome of the 2011 review.

Adjustment needed to ensure alignment

50. The adjustments needed would be as follows:

- Approval of the successor plan in September 2011 could be postponed to the first regular (January) or annual session (June), in 2012, to allow the comprehensive policy review to be reflected in the plans within a window of two to three months before submission to the Executive Board at its annual session in June 2012. However, this process would spillover into the first year of the new plan.
- To ensure alignment with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the current plan could be extended to cover 2012 and the new cycle could start in 2013.

United Nations Children's Fund

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

51. By the time the comprehensive policy review concludes in December 2011, UNICEF would have reached the end of the second year of its planning cycle (under the 2010-2013 cycle).

Adjustment needed to ensure alignment

52. The adjustments needed would be as follows:

- In order for the guidance from the 2011 comprehensive policy review to be reflected in the 2010-2013 plan, adjustments could be made to the plan in midstream.
- If the UNICEF Executive Board decides to extend its current plan by two years, up to 2011, the successor plan starting in 2012 would not benefit from the timely guidance of the 2011 comprehensive policy review. An option

would be to further extend the current plan to 2012. The successor cycle would then cover 2013-2016.

World Food Programme

Scenario under the current strategic planning cycle

53. By the time the comprehensive policy review concludes in December 2011, a new rolled plan (2012-2015) would have been prepared and would be ready for implementation.

Adjustment needed to ensure alignment

54. An option would be to review and update ("roll") the plan starting in 2013 instead of 2012, in order for the plan to draw upon the full guidance provided in the 2011 comprehensive policy review during the planning process that would occur in 2012.

C. Review of the two options

Option 1

55. Option 1 (holding the first quadrennial comprehensive policy review in 2014) would require the fewest adjustments to the current and subsequent planning cycles of UNDP, UNFPA and WFP, including their budget processes. Only UNICEF would need to make an adjustment, which would involve extending the current cycle by two years, with a corresponding biennial budget, a change that is in any case currently under consideration by its Executive Board. If UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF align their planning cycles, WFP would not be in alignment with the cycles every two years, if it continued to adopt a two-year cycle. To ensure full alignment, WFP would need to consider a fixed four-year planning cycle, starting in 2012. Its biennial management plan could be more instrumental in providing flexibility to adjust to emerging situations.

Option 2

56. Option 2 (holding the next comprehensive policy review in 2011 instead of 2010) would necessitate that adjustments be made in all four organizations in order to adopt 2013-2016 as a synchronized plan period. Adjustments might involve extending by one year the relevant plan cycle for UNDP and UNFPA, while extending the UNICEF plan by three years and shortening the WFP plan (2010-2013) by one year. In the case of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, this would mean having more time spent on implementation rather than on planning between 2008 and 2012. This option, however, would also have implications for adjusting the biennial support budgets. In the case of UNDP and UNFPA, adjusting the plan period to 2013-2016 might require either special budget approval to cover 2012, or an extraordinary three-year budget to cover the period 2012-2014. In the case of UNICEF, extending its current plan by three years, to 2012, might require either approving a three-year support budget to cover the period 2010-2012, or having a special one-year support budget to cover 2012. In the case of WFP, adjusting its rolled cycle to 2013-2016 (instead of 2012-2015) would not affect the biennial support budget for the period 2012-2013; its next biennial support budget, however,

would cover only up to 2015. WFP could either approve a special support budget to cover 2016 or approve an extraordinary three-year support budget to cover the period 2014-2016.

V. Recommendations

57. The General Assembly may thus wish to consider:

(a) Deciding to change the comprehensive review from a triennial to a quadrennial cycle;

(b) Deciding when to hold the first quadrennial policy review, based on a review of options 1 and 2;

(c) Recommending that UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP undertake the changes, if any, required to align their planning and budgetary processes with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and report to the Economic and Social Council on adjustments made to fit the new comprehensive policy review cycle at the Council's substantive session of 2009;

(d) Recommending that the Executive Board of WFP consider changing the WFP planning cycle in order to align the WFP strategic plan with the new quadrennial policy review.